

The Builder.

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SATURDAY, MAY 10, 1845.



THE first Monday in May is waited for with eagerness and anxiety by a large number of persons. That section of the public who regard with interest the progress of art in this country look to the opening of the Royal Academy for an assurance that our painters, sculptors, and architects, are advancing, and pass up the staircase full of curiosity, and impatient to see what has been done. Many amongst them, by the operations of the Art-Union, have acquired the right of purchasing a picture, and, excited by a desire to have an early choice, and obtain what may really be a prize, enter with greater anxiety and stronger feelings of interest. But the class to whom this Monday is of the greatest moment is, of course, the artists themselves; the 800 producers, in the present instance, of the 1470 works exhibited; to say nothing of a large body of persons who, having had their own productions refused, pay their shilling and enter depressed, to discover, if it may be, in what they are inferior to their more fortunate contemporaries.

Amongst the authors of the accepted work, the rising, the risen,—enter many beating hearts on that Monday, when they are to learn whether the result of the chief part of the past year's labour has been appreciated, and is likely to produce a return, or that his time has been thrown away. The failure of an artist at the public exhibition, let it be remembered, is, in nine cases out of ten, a failure for a year; and, according to the position of his picture or his statue, is his chance of success. Many a pang have fine spirits suffered, hardly recovered from in some cases, on that first day: such pangs as those who are not in the same position are quite unable to conceive of. We remember the case of a young artist last year, which shews the effect of disappointment and wounded self-love on some minds. He had produced an admirable work; it was the labour of the year, and went to the extent of his power. By accident rather than design, it was condemned to the "octagon room,"—the black-hole, as it is expressively called, and was as much put out of public view as if it had remained in the artist's study. So affected was the painter by the entire destruction of his expectations thus produced, that he immediately sold all that he had and left the country. We are free to admit, that we have no great faith in genius which is depressed by the first difficulties that occur, but there are few minds that can withstand repeated mortifications and disappointment, and the object of our remarks is to aid in awakening those on whom the onerous duty devolves of hanging the pictures at the Royal Academy, to the great responsibility attached to the office, and to induce greater and graver consideration to it than is sometimes given.

We would at the same time bid those who consider the treatment they receive not equal to their merits, persevere in their endeavours, and shew their real power by overcoming difficulties. An estimable member of the Royal Academy writing recently to one who had been

rejected by that body as a student, urged truly, that it would be much better in the end than if he had been admitted on the first trial; and cited various mortifications he had himself experienced, and the advantages which had resulted. At the conclusion of his letter, he says,—“There is a little song on this subject, the burden of which is ‘try, try, try, again.’ The wisdom of this ditty so struck my mind when I first heard it, that even to this moment whenever I am thwarted in a good object I sing ‘try, try, try, again;’ and this we earnestly recommend to all our young readers.

The present exhibition at the Royal Academy, although wanting in the works of some of our best artists, and abounding in portraits, especially in the principal room, to an extent greater than usual, must be regarded as very satisfactory. Of first-rate works, pictures of high class, there are few, perhaps we ought strictly to say none; but in the next grade there are many of great excellence, to which we shall hereafter point attention.

The architectural room contains 136 drawings belonging to that subject, mixed up as usual with heterogeneous oil-paintings,—shipping, burlesque portraits, the Queen opening Parliament, and Austrian pilgrims. Few of the elder members of the profession are exhibitors on the present occasion. Messrs. H. E. Kendall, jun., Railton, Thomas Little, Gwilt, Wyatt and Brandon, Wigg and Pownall, Cottingham, Mocatta, E. B. Lamb, Owen Jones, Beazley, Douthorne, Derrick, &c., have drawings, but, as a whole, the collection offers no great claim for attention. We shall speak of it more at length next week.

For the illustration of our present number, we have engraved, from a drawing made for us by Mr. Richardson, No. 1,222, the interior of a new portrait gallery now being erected at Drayton Manor, the seat of Sir Robert Peel, Bart., by Mr. Sydney Smirke, which is especially interesting, as being intended to receive representations of the most eminent men of the day. The length of it is 90 feet; the walls are to be covered with green silk of a diaper pattern, and the ceiling grained oak and touched with gold. The floor will have an inlaid Elizabethan border composed of various woods.

ANCIENT MODELS.

“You, then, whose judgment the right course would steer,
Know well each ancient’s proper character.”

Of all the difficult inquiries which have so long delayed the elucidation of the principles of design, no one question in the wide field of æsthetics has presented obstacles so insurmountable as the correct definition of imitation, and the exact analysis of the extent to which it is valuable in architecture. The injury, which the art sustains during the present hiatus in its progress, is not lessened by any general attempt to unravel its fundamental principles; to balance and estimate the exact and relative importance of the antiquarian, the creative, and the purely matter of fact, and to bring about a state, in which the imitation of ancient models shall be an aid to art, rather than its object. It may well be said, that in all the freaks of fancy which have prevailed under the name of taste, the world has never beheld a state so singular and unsatisfactory as that at present existing. The whole of Europe seems bent on producing structures, which may cheat the observer into the belief, that he has before him the works of another century, and there is no style at this day which we can call our own. It is not only that we shew an entire lack of invention, but we are not consistent even in imitation. From Grecian to Italian, Italian to Gothic, with short reigns of Louis Quatorzième and Cinque-cento, we change our fashions as often in architecture as in hats.

The architecture of Greece, transplanted to Rome, became national, and the only

style for imitation among a people comparatively deficient in inventive genius. Not long confined to the reproduction of Grecian temples, and the adaptation of columns plundered from their original sites, it became essentially different in treatment and in character, and now remains the most complete exponent of the characteristics of the people. So, had we any system, even in imitation; had we no more than one or two styles, and were not led away by every new fancy, however opposed to the end in view, we might hope to find accurate imitation the forerunner of a style characteristic of the nation and the age. Exact imitation, even of objects the most beautiful, is not the highest quality in art, but it is the first and firmest stepping-stone to excellence. That imitation should be the first aim of the artist, we have the opinion of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who said that “by imitation only, variety and even originality of invention is produced.” The choice of style is now regulated by no principle whatever; the same description of edifice may one day rise in the Italian as to-morrow in the Elizabethan, and often under the hand of one architect. We are but students and experimenters, but have not the conviction to which experiment should lead.

We assume that the architect will well consider the purpose and object of his design, for unless these be his main endeavour, it cannot be doubted that the result of his efforts in the art will be incomplete and unsatisfactory. The practice of architecture has palpable and paramount objects; these must be arrived at ere the art of architecture is called into being, or this itself will be defective and spiritless. By many it has been argued, and with some shew of reason, that the origin of all beauty is in utility, but in architecture, which has other objects besides the gratification of the eye or even of the understanding, it must especially be allowed that art holds the second place, though it thus acquires a peculiar grace, which it would not have possessed in another mode of treatment.

“Still follow some, of every art the soul,

Parts answering parts shall slide into a whole,
Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
Start even from difficulty, strike from chance;
Nature shall join you; time shall make it grow
A work to wonder at.”

But, while we assume that the purpose of the edifice is the first matter for the architect's notice, it unfortunately does not follow, that all are agreed as to the objects in view. The various influences, under which the Church of England at present exists, render it necessary for the architect of every work to choose one of two courses, and with the certain prospect, that in pursuing one he will meet with all the enmity of the advocates of the other. Therefore, till the views of all as to the mode of celebrating religious worship are identical, it will continue to be the greatest injustice to condemn an architect for exact imitation of a particular style, when such imitation is often best fitted to meet the ends proposed by his employers. It is true that the reproduction of Gothic churches has sometimes rendered it difficult to distinguish the architecture of the nineteenth from that of the thirteenth century, but let the requirements in a place of worship be once determined, and another century may commence in the progress of ecclesiastical architecture.

The objects and destination of the edifice being provided for, one of two courses might tend to a characteristic style; one—the complete oblivion of every thing we now possess, and a recurrence to the actual wants of man—is manifestly beyond our influence; but a complete investigation of every style of architecture, and the adaptation of all beautiful features, which do not militate with each other and with the actual requirements of the building, should lead to originality, and to the highest efforts of genius, unless analogous principles, evolved by the most able investigators in all the paths of art and science, are erroneous and devoid of foundation. It was an unalterable truth long before the time of Reynolds, that “by being conversant with the inventions of others, we learn to invent, as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think.” There can be no doubt but that he who has the most materials has the greatest means of invention; and if he has not the power of using them, it must proceed from a